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## Harriet A. Harris, ed., GOD, GOODNESS, AND PHILOSOPHY

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*God, Goodness, and Philosophy*, ed. Harriet A. Harris. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. 276 pages. \$39.95 paper.

RAYMOND J. VANARRAGON, Bethel University

This is an interesting and worthwhile book, containing papers presented at a 2009 conference on “God and Morality,” hosted by the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion. It must have been a good conference. The collection does not hold together perfectly well, but on the whole there is much in it of interest on God’s goodness, God’s relation to morality, and similar topics.

The collection is framed by a discussion of philosophy of religion itself. Harriet Harris’s introduction and Victoria S. Harrison’s first chapter (“What’s the Use of Philosophy of Religion?”) raise and suggest responses to problems with the discipline. The main target is analytic philosophy of religion, the alleged problem with it being that it is irrelevant because it tackles issues that matter only to specialists and are disconnected from real world problems. Harrison takes seriously but ultimately rejects Nick Trakakis’s contention that analytic philosophy of religion is useless and that its practitioners should find something else to do (30), and she is friendlier to John Schellenberg’s less radical suggestion that the central topic of the discipline should be religion itself rather than technical issues within specific religious traditions (34–35). Harrison’s own recommendation is that philosophers of religion should become better versed in other areas of philosophy (she mentions particularly metaphysics and ethics) and draw on the resources from a variety of religious traditions in order to become more relevant to the world outside the academy.

There is much to question in Harrison’s diagnosis and suggested cure for what ails the discipline. For one thing, many prominent philosophers of religion today *are* experts in metaphysics or ethics. (Some are also experts in epistemology, a field that Harrison fails to mention despite the fact that many of the problems she says a relevant philosophy of religion might respond to—including those arising from tension between religious belief and science and those concerning the nature of evidence [42]—are clearly epistemological problems.) So to a considerable degree the sort of intra-disciplinary exchange of ideas that Harrison promotes is already happening. Her description of the current state of the field also raises questions. She writes, for example, that “even now most philosophy of religion remains focused on philosophical puzzles connected with the concept of God” (33), an undefended claim that obscures the range of issues with which contemporary philosophers of religion are in fact engaged. And consider the charge of irrelevance. While some work in philosophy of religion is no doubt well removed from the concerns of many religious

believers, the same can be said of work in any academic discipline. The fact is, different people are interested in different issues (as Harris puts it in her introduction, “relevance is in the mind of the beholder” [18]), and academics tend to pursue their subjects where few can or care to follow. Analytic philosophy of religion is hardly unique in this regard. So while it is true that analytic philosophers of religion should reflect on their discipline and strive to increase its relevance—and Harrison makes good points about the importance of doing so in a multicultural world—parts of her assessment of the problem and solution seem eminently debatable.

After the introductory reflections on philosophy of religion, the rest of the book is divided into two parts, with each part itself split in half. Part I is titled “Goodness, Morality, and Transcendence” and is divided into sections containing chapters on divine command theory and on evolution and morality. Part II is on “Evil and the Goodness of God,” and includes sections on divine omnibenevolence and moral responsibility. Here I offer a brief overview and highlight some points of significance, though of course I am not able to highlight them all.

Part I kicks off with an accessible essay, “The Source of Goodness,” in which John Cottingham contends that God does not *create* goodness or beauty itself (54). God instead creates beautiful things and performs good actions. If that is all God does, then it seems that God plays no role as the source of goodness, since, in theory at least, beautiful things can be made and good actions performed in a world without God. Cottingham argues, however, that God still plays a significant role when it comes to moral actions, because in a world with no God there would be no explanation for why certain features of those actions provide a categorical reason to perform them. A world with God, by contrast, does include such an explanation, namely, that by performing them we are drawn towards God, “the source of our being and source of all that is good” (58). Or so says Cottingham. While sympathetic to the general point, I was not convinced by his theistic explanation of moral obligation. It seems strange that the categorical reason I have for helping my neighbor is that doing so helps me.

The other chapters in the section on divine command theory are also well worth reading. Timothy Chappell, in “Euthyphro’s ‘Dilemma,’” argues that Socrates’s target in his discussion with Euthyphro was not divine command ethics itself, but was instead a version of it that seeks guidance from the misbehaving gods of Greek mythology. Chappell’s discussion is instructive and includes a fairly extensive survey of Plato’s writings on the relation of God to morality. The next chapter turns away from Plato and to the Hebrew Bible. In “Beyond Divine Command Theory,” Jaco Gericke makes the case for what he calls “moral realism” in the Hebrew Bible, and finds passages that presuppose “an objective moral order in relation to which Yhwh appears to have changed and with reference to which his nature may be described” (95). The final chapter, by Anders Kraal, defends a divine simplicity solution to the Euthyphro problem (according to which God’s goodness and God’s will are identical, thereby disarming

the dilemma which essentially asks which takes priority) primarily by defending the notion of divine simplicity from a well-known attack on it by Alvin Plantinga.

The section on "Evolution and the Grounds of Morality" begins with an interesting piece by Roger Scruton, in which he argues that we cannot give a complete account of sexual morality without employing such concepts as pollution, defilement, and purity; that contemporary liberalism, which roots morality in human autonomy and rights, has dropped such concepts from our moral vocabulary; and that evolutionary psychology, while explaining how such notions might be adaptive, can do nothing by way of giving them ontological legitimacy. These concepts, as well as notions of piety, sacrilege, and the sacred, are essential to our moral experience (they help explain, for example, our feeling of revulsion towards rape), and point us to a transcendental ground of morality. Scruton's discussion of sexual morality (and also of marriage and family) is colored a bit by his tendency towards overstatement and oversimplification. He seems to think that liberalism bears primary responsibility for the proverbial breakdown of society ("It is not an accident that our own societies are becoming increasingly childless and that children are growing up without the basic forms of accountability to others and capacity for attachment and love. These developments are an inevitable consequence, as soon as people acquire the habit of thinking of themselves in the ways assumed by the official liberal position" [120]). But the issues he addresses are significant and serve again to raise questions about the sources and legitimacy of our moral intuitions.

The other two essays on evolution and morality consider similar issues from different directions. In the brief chapter "Evolution and Agapeistic Ethics," Robin Attfield argues that our evolutionary heritage is compatible with our behaving in genuinely altruistic ways. In "God, Ethics, and Evolution," Herman Philipse rejects Francis Collins's contention that altruistic behavior can only be explained by appeal to God, and goes on to explore the ethical implications of evolutionary theory. His informative and wide-ranging discussion should be helpful to anyone interested in recent scholarship on the topic.

Part II of the book begins with a section on "The Parameters of Omnibenevolence." Dan O'Brien argues, in "God, Omniscience, and Understanding Evil," that omniscience and perfect goodness are incompatible, in so far as understanding sinners and knowing their sinful thoughts requires empathizing with them in a way that would not be possible for a morally perfect being. Ioanna-Maria Patsalidou makes the case, against Eleonore Stump, that God is *not* good to those in hell by preserving them in being and permitting them to live out their sinful natures, since their being may deteriorate as they continue to sin, and their sinful natures may be unfulfilled because of the lack of innocent victims to torment. Patsalidou suggests that in such cases God's goodness may be demonstrated to hell's inhabitants not by allowing their existence to continue, but

instead by annihilating them. A third essay, by Nicholas Wolterstorff, contains an illuminating exploration of the relation of generosity to justice, framed by a discussion of Jesus's parable of the laborers in the vineyard. In that parable, laborers employed for only a short time are generously paid the same as the laborers who worked the full day. Wolterstorff argues that this arrangement was not unjust—the full-day laborers were not wronged by not receiving additional pay—and that the Aristotelian formula for justice in distributions that might yield the conclusion that it *was* unjust is mistaken. Wolterstorff does not pursue the matter, but readers might ponder how his conclusions fit with their own views on the distribution of divine salvific grace.

The final section of the book, titled “God and Moral Responsibility,” contains an unusual pair of essays that address what some lesser-known philosophers have said on that topic, fairly loosely construed. The first, by Vasil Gluchman, contains reflections on the work of two eighteenth-century Lutheran theologians, Pavel Jakobei and Augustin Dolezal, who held different views on sin and evil. Gluchman mostly surveys their ideas and does not include an analysis of which thinker may have been closer to the truth. In the second essay, Alicja A. Gescinska explains the later work of German philosopher Max Scheler and tries to show its connection to his earlier work. One of Scheler's controversial claims in this later work is that we create God rather than the other way around, an apparent departure from his earlier views that (unsurprisingly) did not impress his Catholic contemporaries. While this essay will be of interest to those familiar with Scheler and his style of thinking, Gescinska does more to explain where the thinking came from than to render it compelling.

In short, while the final section of the book does not really fit with what has come before it, the book as a whole contains a valuable collection of essays on an interesting set of topics.

*God and Moral Obligation*, by C. Stephen Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 199 pages. \$99.00 cloth.

MARK C. MURPHY, Georgetown University

Fifteen years have passed since the publication of Robert M. Adams's *Finite and Infinite Goods*, in which Adams argued for a thoroughgoingly theistic account of moral properties.<sup>1</sup> One piece of Adams's account was a divine command theory of moral obligation, on which *being morally obligatory* is

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<sup>1</sup>Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999).